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ABSTRACT

Responses of 127 rural high school sophomores and juniors were used to examine 3 factors influencing judgments and disciplinary decisions of adolescent peer juries. The factors were levels of moral reasoning, gender of offender, and severity of the offender's act. Subjects first responded to a questionnaire testing moral development. The 113 usable questionnaires were ranked according to the percentage of principled reasoning; the upper and lower 36 were included in the remainder of the study. These 72 subjects were randomly assigned to read 1 of 4 vignettes describing identical misbehaviors by males or females. On the basis of questionnaire scores, they were assigned to high, low, or mixed score dyads. Statistical analysis revealed that the level of a student's moral development did not influence disciplinary decisions; disciplinary decisions were more severe for serious female misbehavior than for male; and disciplinary decisions made by dyads were not different from individual decisions or from each other. Future investigations could control for the sex of the subject and utilize a different sample, revised vignettes, and another model of moral development. Tables summarize responses of individuals and dyads. The four vignettes are appended. (PB)

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Factors Influencing the Severity and Appropriateness of Disciplinary Decisions Made By Adolescent Peer Juries

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Assocation, Montreal, April 11-15, 1983.

Abstract

One hundred twenty-seven high school students completed the Defining Issues Test. The 113 usable questionnaires were ranked according to their p scores; the upper and lower 36 students were included in the study. Each subject read one of four vignettes, describing either a male or female adolescent committing a major or minor infraction of school rules, rated the misbehavior for severity, and recommended a punishment. A 2 (gender of offender) X 2 (severity of misbehavior) X 2 (p score) MANOVA was performed. Dyads either matched or mixed on the basis of p scores were formed, the vignettes re-read, and joint recommmendations made. Analysis was a 2 (gender of offender) X 2 (severity of misbehavior) X 3 (type of dyad) MANOVA. Results showed no significant main effect for individuals or dyads, but did yield significant gender X severity interactions. Interpretation and implications of the results follow.

As long as there have been schools, there have been discipline problems. In their search for classroom control, teachers and adminstrators have tried, with varying success, everything from caning and dunce caps to sophisticated, subtle forms of psychological pressure. In recent years, some schools have turned the first level of disciplinary action over to the students themselves in the form of student courts, disciplinary tribunals, or peer juries (Helmus, 1982; George, 1980; Sullivan, 1980). Although these authors concur that student-developed and implemented discipline programs are effective, little empirical research has been done to explore the psychological and social dynamics of these situations. The purpose of this study is to examine three factors that may influence the judgment and disciplinary decisions of adolescents who serve on peer juries.

Since the early to mid-sixties, the idea of moral development as a strong and pervasive influence on an individual's behavior has become an integral part of our thinking about childhood and adolescence (Kohlberg, 1966; Rest, Turiel, and Kohlberg, 1969; Kohlberg, Note 1). Using Kohlberg's stage theory as their framework for research on legal reasoning, Radosevich and Krohn (1981) investigated the impact of mitigating circumstances on judgements of adolescents at varying levels of moral development. They found that subjects at the principled stages (5 and 6) were least likely to alter their original sanctions when mitigators were added to a vignette, while conventional reasoners (stages 3 and 4) were most likely to change. Subjects at stages 1 and 2 (pre-conventional) were more likely to change than were principled reasoners.

When applied to school curricula, the theory of moral development has not always been as useful as hoped. Leming (Note 2) questioned whether the advancements since the mid 1960's in the area of moral education have had any

impact on students' social behavior: "The major error of contemporary moral education has been its failure to take into account the social basis of the learning of morality" (p. 15). In an extensive review of literature regarding values education, Nucci (1982) argued that morality and social convention constitute different conceptual domains, each having unique developmental patterns. Hence, teachers who want to stimulate their students' moral and social development must keep their responses to transgressions domain-appropriate. For example, if the teacher makes a moral issue out of an act viewed as a social convention by the students (or vice versa), development is unlikely to occur.

George (1980), arguing that the approach of a teacher to classroom discipline is related to the levels of moral reasoning of the teacher and students, has hypothesized a hierarchy of disciplinary strategies parallel to Kohlbergian stages. Adolescents, generally at stages three and four, should have their discipline centered around "group inclusion-exclusion" and "reality therapy" (p. 59). The development of rules by classroom groups at the high school level is appropriate and congruent with the stage three to four transition then occuring, according to George. In a program called SPACE (Student Participation and Counseling Effort), Candler and Goodman (1979) provided adolescents with the skills to manage their own behavior. Through an opportunity to discuss their actions, feelings, and rationales with peers, students worked to develop acceptable behavior patterns. SPACE was effective, said the authors, because ". . . authority-figure controlled management is incongruous with the current educational trend to shift the role of the educator from that of a dispenser of knowledge to that of a facilitator of learning" (p. 88). Similarly, in a high school setting, a Board of Appeals (student court) devised and implemented by students was shown to enhance the moral development of the group, especially the

students actually participating (Sullivan, 1980). At the middle school level, in a classroom "democracy" exercise, students wrote and enforced their own constitution. When a student broke the rules, he/she could be put on trial before a peer jury. Usually, punishments were more imaginative, severe, and effective than those formerly imposed by the teacher (Helmus, 1982). Indeed, peers have been shown to be powerful models for a child's prosocial and antisocial behavior (Leming, 1980). As age in adolescence increases, peers serve as the most appropriate source of information in social-judgement situations (Young and Ferguson, 1979). Berndt (1979) has found a curvilinear trend for conformity for antisocial, neutral, and prosocial behaviors, with conformity to peers peeking in midadolescence.

The degree of sophistication in decision-making among adolescents has been shown to be related to age. In a study of students over grades seven to twelve, Lewis (1981) found that as age increases, so does the consideration given to possible risks and future consequences of decisions. Enright and Lapsley (1981) reasoned that intolerance changes along a social-cognitive-developmental continuum. In their study, seventh-graders tended to decline to evaluate others in relation to the others' beliefs.

Factors that influence decision-making in jury situations have been studied by several authors, although the subjects used in these investigations are usually adults. Foss (1981) has found the degree of initial disagreement among jury members to be significantly correlated with the time taken to reach a decision. In addition, he found that juries were less likely to reach a decision if the members began with a greater degree of disagreement. Another important factor in small-group decision-making is whether or not the group is required to reach consensus. Davis, et al. (1981) found that in a mock jury situation, jurors

who were required to reach consensus in their group were more likely to reach a guilty verdict than were jurors required merely to discuss the case without coming to a verdict. Schwibbe and Schwibbe (1981) have shown that the sex and attractiveness of the "offender" is important to simulated juries when they determine guilt or innocence. However, suggested punishment for an offender is affected only by the transgression, not by sex.

Kooi and Schutz (1965) identified, through factor analysis, five categories of classroom misbehaviors: 1) Physical aggression, 2) Peer affinity, 3) Attention-seeking, 4) Challenge of authority, and 5) critical dissension.

Four hypotheses were tested in the present study:

1. The level of moral development of a student influences his/her disciplinary decisions.
2. Adolescents judge male and female offenders differently.
3. The severity of the misbehavior influences the severity of the disciplinary decision made by adolescents.
4. Disciplinary decisions made by dyads, either matched or mixed on the basis of moral reasoning level, are different from individual decisions, and from each other.

METHOD

Subjects

One hundred twenty-seven students, comprising the entire sophomore and junior classes at a rural high school, completed the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1974), a paper and pencil test of moral development. Fourteen questionnaires were unusable. The remaining 113 subjects were ranked according to their percentage of principled reasoning (p scores); the upper and lower 36 were

included in the remainder of the study. Of the final 72 subjects, the high-p group was comprised of 17 sophomore girls, 6 sophomore boys, 10 junior girls, and 3 junior boys, while the low-p group included 6 sophomore girls, 13 sophomore boys, 9 junior girls, and 8 junior boys. Chi-square analysis on the sex X moral reasoning level groupings was significant ($X^2 = 8.23$, $p < .01$).

Instruments

The Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1974) is designed to measure a subject's level of moral reasoning. The correlation between the DIT and Kohlberg's moral judgment interviews is 68. Because of time constraints, the short form of the DIT was used in this study. The short form consists of three, rather than the usual six, moral dilemma stories and has a correlation of .93 with the longer version (Rest, 1974).

Four vignettes were written, based on the classification system of Kooi and Schutz (1965). Two involved male characters in serious and minor school misbehaviors and two described females in identical serious and minor situations. Each vignette was followed by a seven-point severity scale, ranging from 1 = very minor to 7 = very severe, and a list of seven disciplinary alternatives ranging from lenient to harsh (See Appendix).

Procedure

The authors administered the DIT as a group test to all subjects, in the school's cafeteria. After scoring, the students were ranked according to their percentage of principled reasoning (p score) which ranged from 0 to 16 out of a possible 27 points. The sample mean was 6.77. The 36 highest subjects (range 8-16) and the 36 lowest (range 0-5) were contacted through the school to

participate in the remaining phases of the study. Because of scheduling difficulties, the follow-up sessions were held on two separate days, a week after the initial testing with the DIT.

All 72 subjects individually read either a male or female version of one of the vignettes, and completed the severity and disciplinary scales. Assignment to the four conditions was random, with the level of moral reasoning serving as a blocking variable. Immediately following the individual responses, the adolescents were randomly assigned to dyads on the basis of their p scores. Three types of dyads were formed: 1) two high-p subjects, 2) two low-p subjects, and 3) one high-p and one low-p subject. Dyads 1 and 2 are referred to as matched and dyad 3 is referred to as mixed in terms of moral reasoning. The dyads then were instructed to re-read their vignettes and to reach consensus on the recommendations, completing joint ratings scales.

Two separate Multivariate Analyses of Variance were performed - one for individual scores and one for dyad scores. The dependent variables, the same in both analyses, were 1) perceived severity of misbehavior and 2) severity of recommended punishment. A 2 (level of moral reasoning) X 2 (gender of offender) X 2 (severity of act) analysis was used in the individual case. For the dyads, a 3 (type of dyad) X 2 (gender of offender) X 2 (severity of act) design was employed.

Results

For individuals, perceived severity scores ranged from 1 to 7 across groups, with a mean of 3.76 and a standard deviation of 1.43. Individual punishment scores had a range of 1 to 6, mean of 2.81, and standard deviation of 1.73. For dyads, the perceived severity scores ranged from 1 to 6, had a mean of 3.78, and

a standard deviation of 1.27. Punishment scores for dyads had range of 1 to 6, mean of 2.89, and standard deviation of 1.53.

In both MANOVA's significant gender X severity interactions were found, using Wilk's Criterion. No other multivariate tests of main effects or interaction reached significance. In the individual case, univariate analysis of recommended punishment yielded a significant severity effect ($F(1,64) = 5.46$, $p < .05$), as well as a gender X severity interaction ($F(1.64) = 8.53$, $p < .01$). For the dyads univariate analysis of perceived severity of act produced a significant gender X severity interaction ($F(1,24) = 6.89$, $p < .05$), while the severity main effect approached significance ($F(1,24) = 4.17$, $p = .052$).

A third MANOVA, comparing individual responses to those dyads, was also performed with no significant results

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Insert Tables
1 & 2 here

Figures 1 and 2 show perceived severity and punishment means for the various experimental conditions.

Insert Figures
1 and 2 here.

As is apparent in Figure 1, both high p and low p individuals rated the severe female misbehavior as most serious and recommended the harshest punishment for it. The high p's rated the severe male act as least serious, but punished the minor female infraction most leniently. The low p's rated and punished the minor female act least severely. Curiously, both high and low p subjects rated the severe misbehavior by a male as <u>less</u> serious than the minor male act, although only the high p's recommended a lighter punishment.

Dyads also rated and punished the severe female act as most serious, with the mixed dyads being the harshest of all groups. Minor acts by females were rated and punished as less serious in all cases than the same act committed by a male. However, the matched high p's and the mixed dyads rated the minor females misbehavior equally with the serious male infraction.

Because no significant results were found involving level of moral reasoning, post-hoc analyses were performed with that variable collapsed across levels. Using Dunn's procedure for individual comparisons, results were as follows. For the individual responses on the punishment dependent variable, two significant comparisons were found. Female-severe act vs. female-minor act was significant at the .01 level (t= 3.72). Female-minor act vs. male-minor act was significant at the .05 level (t=2.38). For the dyad responses on the perceived severity dependent variable, female-severe act vs. female-minor act was significant at the .01 level (t= 3.3), and female-severe act vs. male-severe act was significant at the .05 level (t= 2.69).

Discussion

Four hypotheses were tested in this study. Two were partially supported in interaction, and two were not supported. Hypothesis 1 and 4 will be discussed separately, while hypotheses 2 and 3 will be considered together.

Hypothesis 1: The level of moral development of a student influences his/her disciplinary decisions. No support was found for this hypothesis, either with individuals or dyads. This rather surprising result may be explained in several ways. First, it is possible that the size and homogeneity of the sample precluded achieving a sufficiently wide range of p-scores on the DIT. Subjects in the high-p group may not have been truly high enough to differentiate them from

their low-p counterparts. Secondly, the concept of p-score itself may be misleading. It was assumed that subjects with a high p score would be classified near Kohlberg's (1966) post-conventional reasoning level, stage 5, while the low-p subjects would be conventional reasoners, at stages 3 and 4. Although the DIT short form does not yield clear stage scores, it may be speculated that the high-p subjects in this study were actually operating at the stage 4, or law and order, level, while the low-p's were actually stage 3's or even pre-conventional stage 2's. This would account for the generally harsher perceptions and punishments among the high moral reasoners. A third possible explanation may be the age of the subjects. Unpublished dissertation research conducted at the University of Oklahoma (Carella, 1977) employed a paradigm very similiar to that of the present study, but found a significant moral reasoning level effect, when using a sample of teacher education undergraduates. It may be that the DIT is simply too complex to be used with average adolescents.

Hypothesis 2: Adolescents judge male and female offenders differently.

Hypothesis 3: The severity of the misbehavior influences the severity of the disciplinary decision made by adolescents. Although no significant gender main effect was found, it is apparent from the gender X severity interactions that identical misbehaviors are viewed differently depending on the sex of the offender. Futhermore, the post hoc comparisons indicated a significantly wider range of scores between female severe and minor acts than between male severe and minor acts. It can be concluded, then, that disciplinary decisions are more affected by the severity of misbehavior when the offender is female. This finding is in contrast to the results of Schwibbe and Schwibbe (1981). Both hypotheses 2 and 3 may be said to have been partially supported in interaction.

Insert Figures
3 and 4 here

A possible explanation for these results lies in the nature of the vignettes used. In the severe misbehavior scenario, the actor is verbally provoked before striking an adversary in the face. In the minor infraction, the actor, who is under a variety of stresses, has a verbal emotional outburst and stalks from a classroom. One may conjecture that a double standard of appropriateness still exists for males and females, at least in one rural high school. Females using physical violence were judged and punished more harshly than all other groups, while females having emotional outbursts were judged and punished more leniently that all other groups. The subjects apparently felt that it is "natural" for a boy to respond to an insult with physcial force, while the "natural" response of a girl under strain is to verbalize her emotions. Just as aggressive females are regarded as somewhat aberrant in athletics, business or politics, and a male who shows too much feeling or doesn't "stick up for himself" is seen as equally non-normal, so the fictional characters in these vignettes were judged according to societal expectations.

Hypothesis 4: Disciplinary decisions made by dyads, either matched or mixed on the basis of moral reasoning level, are different from individual decisions, and from each other. On the basis of these data, this hypothesis cannot be supported. Again, the size and homogeniety of the sample may partly account for the lack of significance here.

Implications

This research was undertaken to explore an alternative to adult-controlled discipline in secondary schools. Certainly, there is ample theoretical reason to

believe a system of peer juries is workable. In refining our approach to the problem, we should, perhaps, conduct a similiar investigation using a different sample and revised vignettes. Furthermore, since no attempt was made here to control for the sex of the subject, it could be fruitful, in light of the gender X severity interaction, as well as the significant chi-square produced in the sex X n-score groupings, to investigate any differences in decisions made by male and female adolescent judges.

There are also implications for moral development research. Some authors (Gilligan, 1982, Gibbs, 1979) have recently criticized and offered alternatives to Kohlberg's model. It would be useful to explore these same kinds of practical decision situations using another model of moral development. Gilligan's model, for example, places interpersonal relationships, rather than individual rights, at the center of morality. A second implication is that perhaps not all judgment situations are related to moral reasoning, as Nucci (1982) has argued. A third possibility is the questionable validity of the Defining Issues Test when used with non-urban high school students.

Table 1: Univariate ANOVA summary table for recommended punishment dependent variable, individuals' responses (N=72).

Source	df	Sum of Squares	F
Level of Moral Reasoning	1	2.72	1.05
Gender of Offender	1	.50	.19
Severity of Act	1	14.22	5.46*
Moral Level X Gender	1	.50	.19
Moral Level X Severity	1	3.56	1.37
Gender X Severity	1	22.22	8.53**
Moral Level X Gender X Severity	1	.89	.34
Error	64	166.67	

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Table 2: Univariate ANOVA Summary table for perceived severity of act dependent variable, dyads' responses (N=36).

Source	df	Sum of Squares	F
Level of Moral Reasoning	2	1.39	.53
Gender of Offender	1	1.78	1.36
Severity of Act	1	5.44	4.17
Moral Level X Gender	2	.39	.15
Moral Level of Severity	2	3.72	1.43
Gender X Severity	1	9.00	6.89*
Moral Level X Gender X Severity	2	3.17	1.21
Error	24	31.33	

* $p < .05$

Figure 1: Individuals' perceived severity of act and recommended punishment.

		Male Offender		Female Offender	
		Severe	Minor	Severe	Minor
High P	Perceived Severity	3.78	3.89	4.56	4.0
	Recommended Punishment	2.56	3.44	3.89	2.11
Low P	Perceived Severity	3.33	3.56	4.0	3.0
	Recommended Punishment	3.0	2.56	3.56	1.33

Figure 2: Dyads perceived severity of act and recommended punishment.

		Male Offender		Female Offender	
		Severe	Minor	Severe	Minor
Matched High P	Perceived Severity	3.67	4.0	4.33	3.67
	Recommended Punishment	2.33	3.33	3.0	2.67
Matched Low P	Perceived Punishment	3.67	2.67	5.0	2.67
	Recommended Punishment	2.67	2.67	3.33	1.0
Mixed	Perceived Serverity	3.0	4.3	5.33	3.0
	Recommended Punishment	3.67	3.0	4.33	2.67

FIGURE 3: GENDER × SEVERITY INTERACTION ON PUNISHMENT DEPENDENT VARIABLE INDIVIDUALS' RESPONSES.

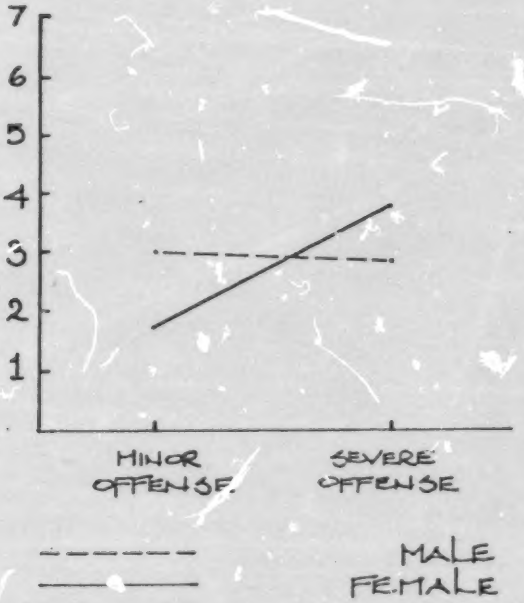
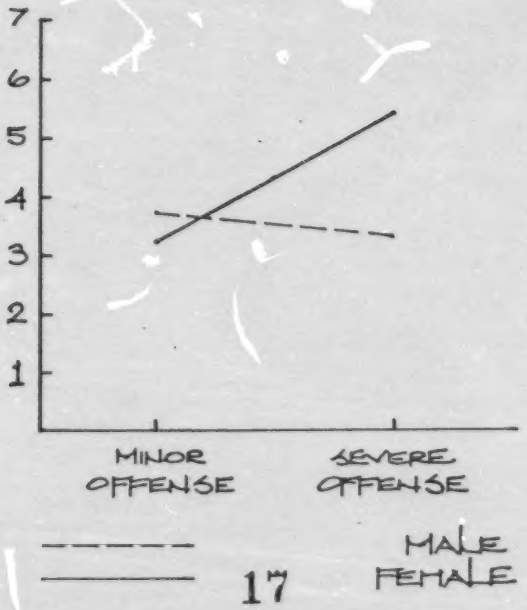


FIGURE 4: GENDER × SEVERITY INTERACTION ON PERCEIVED SEVERITY DEPENDENT VARIABLE, DYADS' RESPONSES



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Appendix

Decisions About School Problems

Please read the following short story and mark your responses in the spaces provided.

It is a Friday afternoon in October, and all the students at Jefferson High School are entering the gym for a school-wide pep assembly. There is a large crowd gathered outside one door waiting to squeeze through. Mark, a sophomore, accidently shoves into one of his classmates, Doug. Doug, who dislikes Mark anyway, turns around, makes an insulting comment, and pushes Mark's shoulder roughly. Mark draws back his arm and hits Doug in the face, breaking his glasses.

How severe do you think Mark's action was?

Very minor _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Very severe

If you had to decide Mark's punishment, which of these would you choose? (check one)

_____1. A really good talking-to by the principal.
_____2. Some kind of service work around the school
_____3. Detention hall 1 hour a day for a week
_____4. Some kind of corporal punishment (paddling)
_____5. In-house suspension for 3 days
_____6. One week's suspension
_____7. Expulsion from school

If you have any better or different ideas, or any comments to make about this situation, please write them here.

Decisions About School Problems

Please read the following short story and mark your responses in the spaces provided.

It is a Friday afternoon in October, and all the students at Jefferson High School are entering the gym for a school-wide pep assembly. There is a large crowd gathered outside one door waiting to squeeze through. Beth, a sophomore, accidently shoves into one of her classmates, Sandra. Sandra, who dislikes Beth anyway, turns around, makes an insulting comment, and pushes Beth's shoulder roughly. Beth draws back her arm and hits Sandra in the face, breaking her glasses.

How severe do you think Beth's action was?

Very minor _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Very severe

If you had to decide Beth's punishment, which of these would you choose? (Check one)

_____1. A really good talking-to by the principal.
_____2. Some kind of service work around the school
_____3. Detention hall 1 hour a day for a week
_____4. Some kind of corporal punishment (paddling)
_____5. In-house suspension for 3 days
_____6. One week's suspension
_____7. Expulsion from school

If you have any better or different ideas, or any comments to make about this situation, please write them here.

Decisions About School Problems

Please read the following short story and mark your responses in the spaces provided.

Joe, a Junior at East High School, has had a rotten morning. He had a flat tire, making him late for history class, in which he had an exam. He did poorly on the test and may lose his eligibility for the basketball team. When he gets to English class, Terry the class busybody, reminds him that this term paper is now a week overdue. Joe, who is by now in a terrible mood, shouts at Terry to "shove the damn term paper!" and stalks out of the room.

How severe do you think Joe's action was?

Very minor _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Very severe

If you had to decide Joe's punishment, which of these would you choose?

(Check one)

_____1. A really good talking-to by the principal.
_____2. Some kind of service work around the school
_____3. Detention hall 1 hour a day for a week
_____4. Some kind of corporal punishment (paddling)
_____5. In-house suspension for 3 days
_____6. One week's suspension
_____7. Expulsion from school

If you have any better or different ideas, or any comments to make about this situation, please write them here.

Decisions About School Problems

Please read the following short story and mark your responses in the spaces provided.

Donna, a Junior at East High School, has had a rotten morning. She had a flat tire, making her late for history class, in which she had an exam. She did poorly on the test and may lose her eligibility for the basketball team. When she gets to English class, Terry the class busybody, reminds her that her term paper is now a week overdue. Donna, who is by now in a terrible mood, shouts at Terry to "shove the damn term paper!" and stalks out of the room.

How severe do you think Donna's action was?

Very minor _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Very severe

If you had to decide Donna's punishment, which of these would you choose? (Check one)

_____1. A really good talking-to by the principal.
_____2. Some kind of service work around the school
_____3. Detention hall 1 hour a day for a week
_____4. Some kind of corporal punishment (paddling)
_____5. In-house suspension for 3 days
_____6. One week's suspension
_____7. Expulsion from school

If you have any better or different ideas, or any comments to make about this situation, please write them here.